

A.W.S.L.G. ALLOTMENT NEWS

ADDISCOMBE, WOODSIDE & SHIRLEY LEISURE GARDENS LTD
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WILDLIFE WINTER TO SPRING REVIEW

NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2021

COMMITTEE NEWS

Although the band of loyal volunteers who care for the meadow are enjoying a winter break, December to February, any pleasant winter day is an opportunity to lift clumps of herbaceous perennials from the island beds where they have received a lot of TLC and plant them in the shorn meadow where survival will be more of a challenge. Ox-eye daisies, purple knapweeds, greater and salad burnets and helenium more than hold their own in their new surroundings but echinacea and rudbeckias sometimes struggle to adapt.

At about the time our group reconvene at the start of March the frogs emerge from hibernation and the pond hosts an orgy of activity with countless frogs followed shortly by tens of sago puddings of spawn. Some of this abundance was requested by plot holders with ponds, a growing number, and found a new home with rather less competition. The local grey heron arrives each morning and feasts well on our distracted frogs, nature red in tooth, beak and claw.

April is a lovely month with the meadow grasses returning to growth and primroses, cowslips, fritillaries (snake's head nut butterflies), pulmonarias and tall camassias vying with each other to be flower of the month. Early butterflies, those which hibernate as adults, enjoy the warming days with yellow brimstones, peacocks, commas and small tortoiseshells being the first arrivals. The latter three all lay their eggs on the abundant nettle patches and the caterpillars live gregariously protected under silk awnings which they create. Not only spiders but many insects produce silk, usually during their immature phase.

DONATIONS NEEDED TO HELP OUR LOCAL FOOD BANK

We shall be making a collection of non-perishable items to help the Shrublands Food Bank at Christmas. Tins and packets with at least 6 months shelf life are welcome, also toiletries and seasonal treats. Donate to the canteen during opening hours or the hall when we have the mulled wine event on Sunday 12th December. The Food Bank will particularly need help on the run-up to Christmas to pack and/or distribute items. If anyone can assist please ring Beverly Warner on 0203 441 7887.

Artisan Craft Market.

We have received a lot of positive feedback from stall holders and those who attended. We thank all who supported us and helped to make this a successful event. We aim to have another Craft market on Saturday 9th April 2022. Stall holders have commented on how well organised the event was and the phenomenal footfall. Others have mentioned that there was a lovely community feel to the event. There was an overall interest in our site, some visitors had not realised we existed and stated how amazed they were at the overall amenities; they also took the opportunity to join our Green Finger Club.

AGM Saturday 11th December at 2.30pm in the Hall.

We recognise there may concerns in regard to the recent Covid news but the Committee are making every effort to actually hold this AGM, please wear a mask when entering the hall.

Relevant papers will be available in the Office, Canteen, and Trading hut on the morning of December 11th. The hall will be open from 2pm.

Mulled Wine and Mince Pies Sunday 12th December.

We invite all ploholders and friends to join us for Mulled Wine and Mince Pies in the hall between 12.30pm -2pm.

Canteen and Trading Hut will be closed from close of business Sunday 12th December and reopen on Saturday 8th January – we are very thankful to the volunteers who have enabled these to be open during the pandemic.

AWSLG Polytunnel from the end of January, weather permitting we begin sowing seed so we have plants for sale in the spring and summer. If you have an hour or two each week please volunteer to help us. We are having to plan the season in a Covid safe way so our team will need extra help. Please ask a committee member for more details.

The Trading Centre will close after the morning session on Sunday 12th December and will remain closed until we reopen at 10.30am on Saturday 8th January 2022.

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JOBS TO DO IN DECEMBER

VEGETABLE CARE:

Parsnips can be left in the ground until needed, or lifted and then buried in a shallow trench for easy access. They taste better when frosted. Make sure to mark the trench as you need to remember where they are and cover it with a protective layer of cardboard if hard frosts are forecast.

If you have Brussels sprouts ready for harvesting, pick the largest sprouts from the bottom of the stalk first. Earth up any Brussels sprouts stalks that look leggy and vulnerable to wind rock.

Continue winter digging as this exposes soil pests to frost and bird predators. Frost will help to improve the condition of your soil by breaking down larger clods. You can incorporate soil improvers into vacant areas of your plot. However try to avoid disturbing the soil too deeply as this can leech valuable nutrients. Ration supplies by manuring selected sites rather than the whole plot. Try a crop rotation plan as different crops have different nutrient requirements. Changing crops annually reduces the chance of particular soil deficiencies developing as the balance of nutrients removed from the soil tends to even out over time.

Clear polythene or **fleece** increases the soil temperature which will help to have earlier spring sowings. Use **Black polythene ground cover** to prevent re-colonisation by weeds and save yourself a back-breaking task in the spring.

Remove yellowing leaves on Brussels sprouts and cabbages to prevent grey mould from becoming troublesome.

Observe good, basic hygiene rules by removing all plant debris from your plots to reduce the spread and the overwintering of disease and pests.

Place **mouse controls** near stored vegetables and fruit.

Now is the time to make a manure hotbed by combining a mixture of manure, straw and leaves into a square, empty compost bin. Cover with a layer of **John Innes no 3**. Place a cold frame on top and then you are all set to benefit from the heat generated by the rotting manure as this will aid the germination of crops that can be started in January. prior planting out in February.

FRUIT CARE:

New fruit trees and bushes can still be planted providing the ground is not frozen or waterlogged. If the planting site is not ready when they arrive, then heel in the bare-root ones in a spare piece of ground, and leave containerised ones standing - but water them when needed.

Check tree stakes and **ties** while doing your winter pruning. They may need loosening, replacing, or removing.

Grape vines can also be propagated using eye cuttings. These are shorter than standard hardwood cuttings (having only one bud, or 'eye'), and are used commercially to produce a large number of plants. Only attempt these if you are confident, as longer cuttings have more buds to rely on for rooting.

Divide and plant rhubarb. Clumps can be lifted and prepared for forcing in early spring.

Net crops to reduce pigeon/parakeet damage.

Apply fatty acid-based winter washes to dormant fruit trees in order to control pests, making sure you treat all the nooks and crannies.

Insulate the greenhouse from frost, we have a good quality **bubble wrap** which works very well.

CHRISTMAS STOCK

We still have some Christmas wreaths left but do hurray as we are only open for 4 more morning sessions. Also available unusual decorations, multicoloured handmade baubles.

A limited number of Christmas winter flowering baskets and solanum plants are available, making ideal presents.

Be guided by the weather and only sow, plant or prune if conditions are suitable.

All items written in **bold italic** are available from the Trading Centre. Please support your Allotment Society as it brings in much needed funds for improvements.

The canteen (normal opening hours 10am to 12 noon) will close after the morning session on Sunday 12th December and will remain closed until we reopen at 10am on Saturday 8th January 2022.